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Tuesday, 12 November 2002, 10.15 a.m.

New York

President:	Zhang Yishan	(China)
Members:	Bulgaria	Mr. Raytchev
	Cameroon	Mr. Belinga-Eboutou
	Colombia	Mr. Valdivieso
	France	Mr. Levitte
	Guinea	Mr. Traoré
	Ireland	Mr. Corr
	Mauritius	Mr. Gokool
	Mexico	Mrs. Arce de Jeannet
	Norway	Mr. Kolby
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Singapore	Mr. Mahbubani
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Mekdad
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Harrison
	United States of America	Mr. Cunningham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Prendergast: I last briefed the Council on 18 October. Since then, while the overall situation on the ground has remained essentially unchanged, there have been a number of significant political developments in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

Against the backdrop of a new Palestinian Cabinet taking office and the collapse of Israel's governing coalition, Israeli-Palestinian violence continues to claim lives on both sides nearly every day. Curfews and other restrictions on movement continue to impoverish increasing numbers of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Israel remains in the midst of its worst economic recession since 1953.

This week, various international meetings are taking place in the region in an effort to respond to the ongoing crisis in three critical areas. First, the Quartet Special Envoys met yesterday to work towards finalizing the road map to a comprehensive peace settlement, which is due to be adopted at a principals-level meeting of the Quartet in December. The Special Envoys, who had previously met on 24 October in Jerusalem, are working to revise the draft road map in the light of consultations with the Palestinians, the Government of Israel and other Governments in the region.

Secondly, the United Nations Special Coordinator, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, is convening a United Nations inter-agency meeting today to review the humanitarian plan of action prepared by a United Nations technical assessment mission that visited the region last month on the recommendation of the Secretary-General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy, Ms. Catherine Bertini. The plan presents strategies for responding to the humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory. Representatives of the Palestinian Authority and the international aid community, as well as the Quartet Envoys, are also providing comments on the plan of action.

Thirdly, the Quartet's capitals-level Task Force on Palestinian Reform will convene in Jordan later this week, along with delegations from the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government. The Task Force will assess the progress of reforms following the conclusion of the "100 days plan" of the Palestinian Authority and will identify means of overcoming key obstacles to reform — particularly in sectors where there has been little progress in recent months, such as the civil service, judiciary, and elections.

The challenges on all of these fronts are formidable. Since my last briefing to the Council, some 46 Palestinians and 30 Israelis have been killed as of yesterday, and at least one more Palestinian has been killed since then. On 5 November, the Palestinian Authority issued a directive to all Fatah offices forbidding members of the movement from opening fire on Israelis "for any reason whatsoever", and the Authority has begun negotiations with Islamist factions intended to secure a commitment to end suicide operations.

As the Council knows, however, late on Sunday night a Palestinian gunman infiltrated Kibbutz Metzer in Israel and shot dead five Israelis, including two children sleeping in their beds. The Al-Aqsa Brigades of the Fatah movement are reported to have claimed responsibility. The Secretary-General has condemned that terrorist attack and has reiterated his concerns about the broader context of the ongoing cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, including extrajudicial killings.

It bears repeating that terrorist attacks damage the Palestinian cause politically, as well as being morally unacceptable. If its orders are to have any credibility, the Palestinian Authority must take all measures within its power to apprehend and prosecute the gunmen responsible for this crime, as well as those who ordered them to carry it out, and to prevent the commission of further acts of terrorism.

Equally, it bears repeating that the Government of Israel must fully respect international humanitarian law in confronting terrorism. On Sunday morning, Israel announced that its soldiers had killed a Palestinian Islamic Jihad operative in Jenin, which Israeli forces had reoccupied two weeks earlier and where they demolished the homes of ten alleged militants and their families. Islamic Jihad immediately pledged to inflict an even more painful strike, as they described it, on Israel and have already claimed responsibility for an explosion on Sunday afternoon that killed an Israeli soldier in the Gaza Strip. Islamic Jihad also claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack against a bus near Hadera on 21 October that killed 14 Israelis and injured more than 40.

It is clear, therefore, that the distressing, self-perpetuating and ultimately futile pattern of violence shows no signs of abating. As I mentioned in my last briefing, settler violence against Palestinians, especially in connection with the harvesting of olives, is a growing problem. On 27 October, settlers attacked olive pickers from the village of Yanun, near Nablus, injuring four Palestinians, including two children, as well as four volunteers. In previous incidents, Palestinian olive pickers had been killed by settlers. As the Council knows, olives are the backbone of the Palestinian economy in the West Bank.

Israel's confiscation of thousands of dunums of agricultural land near the green line, so as to facilitate construction of its separation wall, is also heightening tensions. According to Israeli human rights organizations, the northern segment of the wall will leave at least eight villages, home to more than 10,000 Palestinians, stranded between the wall and the green line. And it will cut off access by West Bank residents to their agricultural land and water resources. Once completed, the wall could effectively annex approximately 7 per cent of the West Bank. Although Israel is entitled to safeguard the security of its citizens, it must do so without prejudicing the rights of Palestinians or pre-empting the contours of a permanent territorial settlement.

Moving to the humanitarian situation, curfews have been eased in a number of places in recent weeks, notably Ramallah and Hebron. However, residents of the Palestinian towns of Jenin, Nablus, Qalqilya, and Tulkarem continue to suffer, with curfews lasting an average of 17 hours a day. Strict restrictions on movement also remain in place for Palestinians travelling within the West Bank, and humanitarian personnel continue to face difficulties accessing Palestinian areas. In addition, ambulances are reportedly still facing lengthy delays at checkpoints — sometimes for as long as two and a half hours — despite the pledge first made to the Secretary-General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy, Catherine Bertini, last August and repeated on subsequent occasions by Israeli authorities that ambulances would not be delayed longer than half an hour at each checkpoint, which would still be far too long.

Another humanitarian commitment by the Government of Israel was to facilitate the passage of water tankers inside the West Bank. Some 200 villages, with approximately 200,000 residents, are without a local source of water, at least during the dry months. The majority of those villages are located in Area C. In other words, they are under full Israeli civilian and security control, and are thus not served by the Palestinian Authority water networks. Villagers are dependent on water delivered daily by tankers for their household use and many also for their livelihoods. Israeli security forces continue to delay tankers severely or even outright prevent them from gaining access to villages. The consequence is that a regular supply of water is not assured. The United Nations has urged the Government of Israel to fulfil its pledge to Ms. Bertini to facilitate the delivery of water. Unfortunately, we observe no improvement.

On 29 October, the Palestinian Legislative Council gave a vote of confidence to a new Cabinet appointed by President Arafat. The Cabinet includes eight new ministers, three of whom were first appointed last June but never confirmed in office. By decree, the Cabinet will remain in office in a caretaker capacity until new elections are held.

Those elections are currently scheduled for 20 January, 2003. President Arafat has appointed a new electoral commission, which is chaired by a respected

independent. Many observers are, nevertheless, sceptical about the prospects of holding elections as soon as January, citing the absence of an approved legislative framework for elections and the difficulty of preparing for and holding elections while many West Bank cities remain under Israeli military occupation and are subject to severe restrictions on movement. The Palestinian people last had the chance to vote in January 1996. Everything possible should therefore be done to help ensure that elections can take place.

New elections in Israel will be held on 28 January, 2003. On 4 November, after failing to establish a new coalition Government following the departure of the Labour Party from the coalition, Prime Minister Sharon announced his decision to go to early elections within 90 days, and President Katzav dissolved the Knesset. Between now and the date of the elections, Labour and Likud will hold primary contests to select their candidates for Prime Minister.

I would like now, if I may, to turn to developments in Lebanon. Despite the reduced rhetoric and lower profile of the issue in both Lebanon and Israel, the Wazzani Springs water project continues to be a source of tension along the Blue Line. Since the last briefing to the Council, there has been constant diplomatic activity aimed at defusing tensions. The United States, the European Union and France have recently dispatched water experts to the region in order to work towards a resolution of the issue.

The United Nations has remained in close contact with all parties in an effort to facilitate a reduction in the level of tension. Certain media reports have indicated that, while water has begun to be drawn from the Wazzani Springs under the current project, the amount being pumped may, for the time being, be limited. Both sides should be encouraged to work towards a diplomatic resolution of the matter.

Israeli air violations continue to be a cause for concern. Israeli aircraft have continued to violate the Blue Line and Lebanese airspace, drawing anti-aircraft fire from the Lebanese side of the line. This anti-aircraft fire, and the shrapnel that it produces, continues to fall over northern Israeli towns and villages.

On 3 November, there was a marked increase in the number of air violations. It was reported that Israeli aircraft overflew southern Lebanon, the Bekaa valley and the capital city, Beirut. Again, those sorties were met with anti-aircraft fire.

Both the air violations and the ensuing anti-aircraft fire carry the potential for a deterioration of what is already a tense situation. All parties should be reminded of their obligations fully to respect the Blue Line and to refrain from all violations thereof.

The coming elections in Israel will consume a great deal of attention, both in the region and beyond, and there may be a temptation to suspend efforts on other fronts until they have been concluded. We cannot afford that luxury. As I argued during my last briefing, a deterioration of the situation on the ground only makes it more difficult to pursue our collective objective of a two-state solution. The maintenance of the status quo — with its high levels of violence, increasing human suffering and loss of life and steady erosion of even a minimum of mutual trust and respect — should not be an option, as this can only lead to a further worsening of conditions.

The current efforts of the Quartet and others to develop strategies for addressing simultaneously political, security, humanitarian and reform issues need the international community's full support and attention. In order to succeed, however, we need to pursue these efforts within a coherent framework to which the parties have agreed, and the parties need to stay the course and carry out long-standing commitments. For that reason it is of critical importance that the Quartet finalize its road map as soon as possible and then obtain the explicit agreement of both sides and of the international community to follow that map to a just, lasting settlement of this conflict.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Prendergast for his comprehensive briefing.

On behalf of the entire membership of the Council, I would like to bid farewell to the Permanent Representative of France, Ambassador Jean-David Levitte. I understand that our respected colleague, Ambassador Levitte, is here with us in this Chamber for the last time before he undertakes his next important assignment.

Ambassador Levitte has made important contributions to the work of the Council through diplomatic skills, an affable manner and a sense of collegiality which have made him a highly effective

representative of his country. I am certain that he will continue to use his talents in his new assignment. We will not forget our colleague Ambassador Levitte. He will be remembered as one who always strived to work in cooperation and harmony with other members of the Council. In bidding him a fond farewell, Council members, including myself, wish him great success and fulfilment in his future endeavours.

Mr. Levitte (France) (*spoke in French*): This is an emotional moment for me, taking leave of my colleagues at this last public meeting in which I will have had the honour of having taken part.

Our Council has become somewhat a family for the 15 members who make it up. I think we probably spend more time together than we do with our real families. Our days and sometimes our nights are devoted to this life in common. I think that this work together helps us understand each other better, what we think in our deepest thoughts. This explains why the Council in recent months and years has made great progress in terms of credibility and effectiveness in its work. The results achieved with regard to Iraq are a particularly striking example of this. This strengthens the credibility and authority not just of the Council, but that of the United Nations. The Secretary-General's initiative on Cyprus, which we supported, is another example.

I would like to say a word about Africa, which is what takes up most of our time together. For me it was an honour to lead the Security Council mission to the Great Lakes region. I think that the fragile progress made is a source of particular satisfaction for all Council members. We should never forget that it is in Africa that the most deadly conflicts continue. In the Great Lakes region alone, in four years there have been three million dead. Therefore I think that our duty is to continue tirelessly our efforts, because if the Security Council does not put all its energy in the African crisis, no one will do it in its place.

I will conclude my stay with you with the Middle East. Perhaps this is the most frustrating issue for members of the Council, the one on which we might express the most regret. Nevertheless, here again, I believe there are positive signs. The very fact that we are having a regular meeting at the initiative of Syria, following a proposal by Tunisia, is in itself a small encouraging sign. In the past we had to fight for weeks to simply have a briefing, but now it is something that seems quite natural. Be it with the Secretary-General or Sir Kieran Prendergast, or Terje Roed-Larson when he is in New York, we have an opportunity to take stock of the situation.

More generally, I think that the Quartet embodies the common will of the international community to fully play its role. Through resolution 1397 (2002), our Council plotted the way, that of two States living in peace, side by side, within secure and recognized boundaries. I believe our Council has to give its full support to the efforts of the Quartet. The road map that Sir Kieran referred to and which is to be adopted next month should receive the Council's support. We shall go back to this during our consultations. But on the case of the Middle East, it is clear that the Security Council must be able to play its full role.

I want to conclude by saying that I shall take with me to Washington not just the most friendly memories of our years of cooperation, but also the values that are incarnated in the United Nations Charter. As I said during the luncheon that the Ambassador of China organized for the Secretary-General a few days ago, if I had not been faithful to these United Nations values, I would be in material breach of my convictions.

Thanks to all of you, and it is only "au revoir", because I will be able to come back again to New York.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Ambassador of France for his comments. Just as he said, he did not do anything that constitutes a material breach of his conviction, whether open or hidden.

Mr. Mahbubani (Singapore): Today's event reminds me of a similar one in January 2001, when we saw the departure of another Security Council superstar, named Richard Holbrooke. I remember that at that meeting it was, I think, Ambassador Levitte who tabled a resolution calling on the Security Council to persuade the United States to delay the departure of Ambassador Holbrooke. Unfortunately, Ambassador Holbrooke exercised his veto and the resolution was not carried. This is why I regret that France too has a veto in this Council, for otherwise we would take the lead in tabling a resolution calling on the Government of France to delay the posting of Ambassador Levitte from here.

Ambassador Levitte, as we all know, has become a truly indispensable member of, as he said, our family, and he has demonstrated tremendous leadership ability.

I, for one, will never forget what Jean-David did on our trips on the Great Lakes mission. I thought there were only twenty-four hours in a day, but under Jean-David, we worked twenty-eight hours a day — morning, day and night.

As Ambassador Levitte said, the most crucial issues we face now are the Middle East and Iraq, and on both we can say that Ambassador Levitte has shown great leadership. I see that *The New York Times* Week in Review section has finally recognized his contribution by giving him a series of photographs that I think may earn him a distinction as being the only Ambassador who has been profiled in that way. It is a well deserved profile. We wish him all the best in his assignment. As he said in his own words just now, this is "au revoir" and "à bientôt".

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.